

Downtown Covina experiencing a renaissance

By Jennifer McLain, Staff Writer

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Downtown Covina is in the middle of a transition, while development throughout the city has stalled, Covina's downtown is experiencing its own renaissance with new restaurants businesses and a new parking structure that has recently opened. (Walt Mancini SGVN/Staff)

COVINA - Downtown Covina may be in the middle of a renaissance.

As other portions of the city struggle to attract new tenants, the former sleepy downtown is experiencing a flurry of activity, ranging from new restaurants to the recently completed Covina Center for Performing Arts.

"Currently, downtown is where you can actually see the development," said Robert Neibur, community development director. "But the other sites in the city are slow right now."

Recently Claro's Italian Market and Fresh Start Restaurant opened in the city's downtown, which runs along Citrus Avenue between San Bernardino Road and Badillo avenues.

And more business is on the way.

The city's long established watering

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hole, Rude Dogs, is doubling in size, Latin restaurant 3Vinos will soon be opening, and Mexican restaurant Zona Rosa Olamedni's is expected to open early 2009.

Meantime, some businesses have taken the city's mandatory requirement to make buildings more earthquake safe as an opportunity to recreate the exterior facades, said Bobbi Kemp, the city's spokeswoman.

"Overall, I feel that downtown Covina is starting to come awake, and people are seeing what a great opportunity we have for a neat downtown," said Retha Champion, the owner of the Covina's Center for Performance Art.

The 96-seat theater opened last October, and neighboring business owners said the opening has breathed new life into downtown.

The center routinely sells out shows and creates foot traffic for nearby businesses.

"The center has brought people back in to downtown, and it is a fabulous addition to the area," said Galen Metz, who recently opened Azovino, a wine bar and art gallery.

Metz said times are tough for him and all business owners. But he chose Covina because it was a "cute" downtown, and believes in its potential to one day be as success.

Before the city can be compared to the likes of downtown Claremont, La Verne or Monrovia, it will take several years, said George Peterson, president of the Covina Downtown Association.

"We've got a lot of people putting money in the downtown right now, but we have to get through the economy problems," said Peterson, who operates Giovanni Ristorante. "It is going to involve into its own, but it is going to take a few more years."

Since the city updated its town center plan in 2004, the vision for downtown shifted into becoming a place where residents can shop, live and walk. Currently, there is a mixture of retail stores and unique restaurants that aren't chain stores.

Earlier this month, the city celebrated the completion of a \$5.6 million parking structure to appease current and future parking complaints. The money was used from restricted redevelopment and transit funds.

Metz believes that developing downtown Covina into something comparable to downtown Monrovia, "is an easy challenge."

But Dick Singer, Monrovia's deputy city manager, said that revitalizing downtown Monrovia was a nearly 30-year process that involved several improvement projects, downtown committees and significant marketing outreach efforts.

"It's Disney's main street, but it's the real thing," said Dick Singer, Monrovia's deputy city manager. "We've worked very hard to maintain this."

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